



TITLE:

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CITATION:

Kurabe, Keita. The small closed adjective class in Jinghpaw. Proceedings of the 51st International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics 2018: 32.

ISSUE DATE:

2018-09

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/235286>

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The small closed adjective class in Jinghpaw

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1 Introduction

The size of the adjective category varies from language to language (Dixon 1977 revised 1982, 2004, Schachter and Shopen 2007).

(1) The size of the adjective category (Dixon 1977/1982)

- a. Languages with a large adjective class, e.g., English, etc.
- b. Languages with no adjective class, e.g., Chinese, etc.
- c. Languages with a small adjective class, e.g., Igbo (8), Hausa (ca. 12), Malak Malak (7), Southern Paiute (ca. 11), etc.
- d. Languages with a slightly larger adjective class, e.g., Venda (ca. 20), Pengo (ca. 20), Sango (ca. 30), Carib (ca. 43), etc.

Dixon (1977/1982) examines how property concepts are lexicalized cross-linguistically.

(2) Lexicalization of seven semantic types as adjectives (Dixon 1977/1982)

- a. Languages with a large class of adjectives (dimension, age, value, color, speed, physical property, human propensity)
- b. Languages with a small class of adjectives (dimension, age, value, color)

(3) Adjectives in Igbo (Welmers and Welmers 1968, 1969, Welmers 1973, cited by Dixon 1977/1982)

DIMENSION	úkwu	‘large’	ñtà	‘small’
AGE	óhūrú	‘new’	ócyè	‘old’
VALUE	óma	‘good’	ójọ́	‘bad’
COLOR	ojií	‘black/dark’	óca	‘white/light’

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the membership of the adjective class in Jinghpaw.

(4) Adjectives in Jinghpaw

DIMENSION	gəbà	‘big’	gəjì	‘small’	gəlù	‘long’	gədùn	‘short’
AGE	nnan	‘new’	dɪŋsà	‘old’				
VALUE	gəja	‘good’						
COLOR	caŋ	‘black’	phrò	‘white’	khyeŋ	‘red’		

2 Previous studies

(5) Adjectives in Hanson (1896: 31–9)

- a. words with property concepts, e.g., gəbà ‘big’, gəlù ‘long’, gəja ‘good’, diŋ ‘straight’, tsòm ‘beautiful’, etc.
- b. demonstratives, e.g., nday ‘this’, day ‘that’, thóra ‘that up there’, etc.
- c. numerals, e.g., ləŋây ‘one’, ləkhôn ‘two’, məsum ‘three’, etc.
- d. lexical quantifiers, e.g., yòn ‘all’, nlaŋ ‘all’, ɛəgù ‘every’
- e. nouns modifying other nouns, e.g., màysàk ‘teak’, myèn ‘Burmese’, sìnpró? ‘east’, etc.

(6) Negatability with a negative prefix

ń-gəbà / *ń-nday / *ń-ləŋây / *ń-yòn / *ń-màysàk
NEG-big / NEG-this / NEG-one / NEG-all / NEG-teak
‘not be big / this / one / all / teaks’

(7) Ability to head an NP

ɛi *gəbà / nday / ləŋây / yòn / màysàk =phé? məri=?ay.
3sg big / this / one / all / teak =ACC buy=DECL
‘He bought a big one / this / one / all / teaks.’

(8) Adjectives in Dai and Xu (1992: 87–95) and Dai (2012: 111–7)

- a. physical property, e.g., jà? ‘hard’, kyà ‘soft’, thàt ‘thick’, tsəŋ ‘light’, khá ‘bitter’, dùy ‘sweet’, gəthèt ‘hot’, gətsì ‘cool’, gəɕuŋ ‘cold’, etc.
- b. human propensity, e.g., diŋman ‘honest’, gəbu ‘happy’, lèt ‘mindful’, dzèt ‘energetic’, etc.
- c. speed, e.g., ləwan ‘fast’, caŋ ‘hurry’, etc.
- d. difficulty, e.g., yàk ‘difficult’, etc.
- e. qualification, e.g., ɕút ‘incorrect’, etc.
- f. quantification, e.g., ló? ‘many’, etc.
- g. position, e.g., tsò ‘high’, etc.

(9) Properties differentiating between adjectives and verbs proposed by Dai and Xu (1992)

- a. Adjectives, when used as predicates, cannot take the imperative mood marker, unlike verbs.
- b. Adjectives cannot take the prohibitive adverb *khùm*, unlike verbs.
- c. Adjectives cannot take objects while transitive verbs can.
- d. Adjectives, when used adnominally, can modify the nominal head in post-nominal position.

(10) Imperatives and prohibitives

Forms	Meanings	Imperative	Prohibitive	Word classes in Dai and Xu (1992)
gəbà	‘big’	*gəbà=ʔùʔ	*khùm gəbà	adjective
gəbu	‘happy’	*gəbu=ʔùʔ	*khùm gəbu	adjective
si	‘die’	*si=ʔùʔ	*khùm si	verb
roŋ	‘be in’	*roŋ=ʔùʔ	*khùm roŋ	verb
sa	‘go’	sa=ʔùʔ	khùm sa	verb
gəlo	‘do’	gəlo=ʔùʔ	khùm gəlo	verb

(11) Transitivity

Forms	Meanings	Transitive	Word classes in Dai and Xu (1992)
gəbà	‘big’	no	adjective
gəbu	‘happy’	no	adjective
si	‘die’	no	verb
sa	‘go’	no	verb
məri	‘buy’	yes	verb
gəlo	‘do’	yes	verb

(12) Modification

Forms	Meanings	Modification	Word classes in Dai and Xu (1992)
gəbà	‘big’	yes	adjective
gəja	‘good’	yes	adjective
caŋ	‘black’	yes	adjective
gəbu	‘happy’	no	adjective
yák	‘difficult’	no	adjective
lóʔ	‘many’	no	adjective

3 The Adjective class

3.1 Defining adjectives

(13) Definition of adjectives in this paper

Adjectives are words that have the ability to syntactically freely modify nominal heads without any morphosyntactic marking.

Adjectives, as noted by Dai and Xu (1992), always follow the nominal head.

- (14) a. *ɕəpre gəbà*
 bean big
 ‘big bean’
 b. *la gəja*
 man good
 ‘good man’
 c. *modo diŋsa*
 car old
 ‘old car’
 d. *ítâ khyeŋ*
 house red
 ‘red house’

Many of the “adjectives” in Dai and Xu (1992) fail to satisfy the modifying criterion.

- (15) a. *?ɕəpre jàʔ*
 bean hard
 ‘hard bean’
 b. *?la diŋman*
 man honest
 ‘honest man’
 c. *?modo ləwan*
 car fast
 ‘fast car’
 d. **gàsán yák*
 question difficult
 ‘difficult question’
 e. **gàsì ɕút*
 word incorrect
 ‘incorrect words’
 f. **ítâ lóʔ*
 house many
 ‘many houses’

(16) Lexical compounds, not syntactic phrases

- a. *pù-khá*
 intestine-bitter
 ‘gallbladder’
 b. **nàmsì khá*
 forest bitter

- (17) a. *gà-ǰədón*
word-measure
'example'
- b. *gà-gəŋaw*
rice-fry
'fried rice'

3.2 The position of adjectives within word classes

Adjectives share a number of features with verbs, thus being able to be best treated as a subtype of verbs.

(18) Major word classes and their distinguishing properties

- a. Nouns are those words that can head an NP, which functions as an argument of verbs.
- b. Verbs are those words that can be directly negated by a negative prefix.

(19) Noun subclasses and their properties

	[a]	[b]	[c]	[d]	[e]	[f]
common nouns	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
numerals	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no
demonstrative pronouns	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
personal pronouns	yes	some	yes	no	no	no
interrogative pronouns	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
locator nouns	yes	no	no	yes	no	no
postpositions	yes	no	no	yes	no	no

Key to properties:

- [a] Can head an NP
- [b] Can be pluralized by a plural marker
- [c] Can be quantified by numerals
- [d] Can be determined by pre-head demonstratives
- [e] Can be determined by post-head demonstratives
- [f] Can be modified by adjectives

(20) Verb subclasses and their properties

	[a]	[b]	[c]	[d]	[e]	[f]	[g]	[h]
achievement verbs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
accomplishment verbs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
activity verbs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
stative verbs	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no
adjectives	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes
copula verb <i>rê</i>	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no

Key to properties

[a] Can directly be negative by a negative prefix

[b] Can take mood and aspect marking

[c] Can be intensified by degree expressions such as ‘very’ when semantically compatible

[d] Can function as a predicate of comparative constructions when semantically compatible

[e] V with declarative marker gives past reading

[f] V with progressive marker gives both progressive and resultative reading

[g] V with change-of-state marker gives inchoative reading

[h] Can syntactically modify a nominal head

4 Semantics

Dixon (1977/1982) shows that four semantic types (dimension, age, value, and color) are likely to be lexicalized as adjectives in languages with a small closed adjective class.

(21) Adjectives in Jinghpaw

DIMENSION	<i>gəbà</i>	‘big’	<i>gəjì</i>	‘small’	<i>gəlù</i>	‘long’	<i>gədùn</i>	‘short’
AGE	<i>ṇnan</i>	‘new’	<i>dṇsà</i>	‘old’				
VALUE	<i>gəja</i>	‘good’						
COLOR	<i>caŋ</i>	‘black’	<i>phrò</i>	‘white’	<i>khyeŋ</i>	‘red’		

(22) Tendencies of how other typical adjectival concepts are coded (Dixon 2004: 4)

- PHYSICAL PROPERTY terms, if not in the adjective class, are generally in the verb class;
- HUMAN PROPENSITY terms, if not in the adjective class, may be in either the noun class or the verb class;
- SPEED terms tend to be in the adjective class if PHYSICAL PROPERTY terms are in this class, and in the adverb class if PHYSICAL PROPERTY terms are in the verb class.

(23) Other semantic types that may be coded as adjectives (Dixon 2004)

DIFFICULTY, SIMILARITY, QUALIFICATION, QUANTIFICATION, POSITION

(24) Lexicalization of adjectival concepts in Jinghpaw (s.v. stands for a stative verb)

- a. DIMENSION: *ləda* ‘wide’ (s.v.), *gyìp* ‘narrow’ (s.v.), *sùŋ* ‘deep’ (s.v.), *taŋ* ‘shallow’ (s.v.), *thət* ‘thick’ (s.v.), *phà* ‘thin’ (s.v.)
- b. AGE: *dìŋla* ‘be old (males)’ (s.v.), *dìŋgay* ‘be old (females)’ (s.v.)
- c. VALUE: *jò* ‘proper’ (s.v.), *ʔəkhàk* ‘important’ (s.v.), *mu* ‘tasty’ (s.v.), *tsòm* ‘beautiful’ (s.v.)
- d. COLOR: *mùt* ‘blue, bluish, grey, brown’ (s.v.), *thòy* ‘yellow, bright’ (s.v.), *ʔmaŋ* ‘purple, dark’ (s.v.)
- e. PHYSICAL PROPERTY: *jàʔ* ‘hard’ (s.v.), *kyà* ‘soft’ (s.v.), *li* ‘heavy’ (s.v.), *tsaŋ* ‘light’ (s.v.), *ŋàŋ* ‘strong’ (s.v.), *dáy* ‘sharp’ (s.v.), *khróʔ* ‘dry’ (s.v.), *mədi* ‘wet’ (s.v.), *sàn-séŋ* ‘clean’ (s.v.), *gəthət* ‘hot’ (s.v.), *lum* ‘warm’ (s.v.), *gəcùŋ* ‘cold’ (s.v.), *khri* ‘sour’ (s.v.), *dùy* ‘sweet’ (s.v.), *khá* ‘bitter’ (s.v.), *jàp* ‘spicy’ (s.v.), *ɕum* ‘salty’ (s.v.)
- f. HUMAN PROPENSITY: *gəbu* ‘happy, glad’ (s.v.), *pyo* ‘happy’ (s.v.), *dìŋman* ‘honest’ (s.v.), *ləgòn* ‘lazy’ (s.v.), *sú* ‘clever’ (s.v.), *məna* ‘mad’ (s.v.), *yòn* ‘sad’ (s.v.), *gùmróŋ* ‘proud’ (s.v.), *lèt* ‘mindful’ (s.v.), *dzèt* ‘energetic’ (s.v.)
- g. SPEED: *ləwan* ‘fast’ (s.v.), *ləʔnyàn* ‘slow’ (s.v.)
- h. DIFFICULTY: *lòy* ‘easy’ (s.v.), *yák* ‘difficult, hard, tough’ (s.v.)
- i. SIMILARITY: *búŋ* ‘similar’ (s.v.), *gəga* ‘different, other’ (noun)
- j. QUALIFICATION: *təŋ* ‘true’ (s.v.), *jò* ‘correct’ (s.v.), *thúk* ‘appropriate’ (s.v.), *ɕút* ‘incorrect’ (s.v.),
- k. QUANTIFICATION: *lóʔ* ‘many’ (s.v.), *kəcí* ‘few’ (s.v.), *ram* ‘enough’ (s.v.), *yòŋ* ‘all’ (noun), *nkaw* ‘some’ (noun)
- l. POSITION: *tsò* ‘high’ (s.v.), *nəm* ‘low’ (s.v.), *tsàn* ‘far’ (s.v.), *ni* ‘near’ (s.v.), *khra* ‘right’ (noun), *pay* ‘left’ (noun), *dìŋdúŋ* ‘northern’ (noun)
- m. CARDINAL NUMBERS: *ləŋây* ‘one’ (noun), *ləkhôŋ* ‘two’ (noun), *məsum* ‘three’ (noun), etc.

5 Syntax of adjectives

5.1 Adjectives as predicate

(25) *numçà day=gò kərá=má grày gəlù=ʔay=dàʔ.*

woman that=TOP hair=also very be.long=DECL=HS

‘The hair of that woman is also very long.’

(26) Negation of verb subtypes

achievement verbs	thèn	‘be broken’	ń-thèn	‘not be broken’
accomplishment verbs	khró?	‘dry’	ń-khró?	‘not dry’
activity verbs	sa	‘go’	n-sa	‘not go’
stative verbs	si	‘die’	n-si	‘not die’
adjectives	phrò	‘be white’	ń-phrò	‘not be white’
copula verb	rê	‘be’	ń-rê	‘not be’

(27) Causativization of verb subtypes

achievement verbs	thèn	‘be broken’	jə-thèn	‘break’
accomplishment verbs	khró?	‘dry’	jə-khró?	‘dry’
activity verbs	khom	‘walk’	jə-khom	‘let walk around’
stative verbs	khá	‘be bitter’	jə-khá	‘make bitter’
adjectives	phrò	‘be white’	jə-phrò	‘whiten’
copula verb	rê	‘be’	n/a	

(28) Change-of-state aspect marking of verb subtype

achievement verbs	thèn	‘be broken’	thèn=say	‘already be broken’
accomplishment verbs	khró?	‘dry’	khró?=say	‘already be dry’
activity verbs	khom	‘walk’	khom=say	‘begin to walk’
stative verbs	khá	‘be bitter’	khá=say	‘coming into being bitter’
adjectives	caŋ	‘be black’	caŋ=say	‘coming into being black’
copula verb	rê	‘be’	n/a	

(29) Gradability

- a. *çi=gò nàw gəbà=?ay.*
3sg=TOP too.much be.big=DECL
‘He is too big.’
- b. *çi=gò nàw gəgàt=?ay.*
3sg=TOP too.much run=DECL
‘He ran too much.’

(30) Comparative constructions

- a. *çi=gò ŋay=thà? graw gəbà=?ay.*
3sg=TOP 1sg=LOC more be.big=DECL
‘He is bigger than me.’

- b. *ɛi=gò ɲay=thàʔ graw gəgàt=ʔay.*
 3sg=TOP 1sg=LOC more run=DECL
 ‘He ran more than me.’

5.2 Adjectives as modifier

- (31) a. *pəloŋ phrò*
 shirt white
 ‘white shirt’
 b. *[phrò=ʔay] pəloŋ*
 white=NMLZ shirt
 ‘shirt which is white’
 c. *nday pəloŋ phrò=ʔay.*
 this shirt white=DECL
 ‘This shirt is white.’
- (32) a. *nday pəloŋ=gò lətáʔ phrò=ʔay.*
 this shirt=TOP hand white=DECL
 ‘As for this shirt, its sleeves are white.’
 b. *[lətáʔ phrò=ʔay] pəloŋ*
 hand white=NMLZ shirt
 ‘shirt whose sleeves are white’
 c. **pəloŋ lətáʔ phrò*
 shirt hand white
- (33) a. *nday pəloŋ=gò phrò=to=ʔay.*
 this shirt=TOP white=CONT=DECL
 ‘This shirt is being white.’
 b. *[phrò=to=ʔay] pəloŋ*
 white=CONT=NMLZ shirt
 ‘shirt which is being white’
 c. **pəloŋ phrò=to*
 shirt white=CONT
- (34) a. *nday pəloŋ=gò grày phrò=ʔay*
 this shirt=TOP very white=DECL
 ‘This shirt is very white.’
 b. *[grày phrò=ʔay] pəloŋ*
 very white=NMLZ shirt
 ‘shirt which is very white’

- c. **pəloŋ grày phrò*
shirt very white
- (35) a. *nday pəloŋ=gò gəbà=nná phrò=?ay.*
this shirt=TOP big=SEQ white=DECL
'This shirt is big and white.'
- b. [*gəbà=nná phrò=?ay*] *pəloŋ*
big=SEQ white=NMLZ shirt
'shirt which is big and white'
- c. **pəloŋ gəbà phrò*
shirt big white
- d. **pəloŋ gəbà=nná phrò*
shirt big=SEQ white

6 Conclusions

- Contrary to the assumption of previous works, Jinghpaw has a small class of adjectives.
- Adjectives are a subtype of verbs.
- All of the small adjective class encode the four core semantic types of adjectives (dimension, age, value, color).
- The two main functions of adjectives are predication and modification.

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